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ABSTRACT

Children who are raised in poverty currently run grave risks of educational failure. This paper approaches the issue, not through concentrating on special problems of, and programs for, the educationally at-risk, but through focusing on the educational problems of young people generally and on the effect that schools, not programs, play in alleviating or worsening those problems. A school survives, grows, and adapts through constant exchange with its environment. Internally, it has its own distinctive structures and processes, its own culture. The organization and the structure together constitute an overarching system of behavior in which everything is related to everything else. These factors determine the schools' educational effectiveness. Examination of the High School and Beyond (HSB) and the Administrator and Teacher (ATS) surveys reveals the following factors that affect school performance: (1) external authorities; (2) school staffing; (3) principals; (4) goals and policies; and (5) teachers and teaching. Private schools, which appear to be more effective than public schools, tend to develop team-like organizations that exercise greater control over the school; public schools are captives of democratic policies. The experience of Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (originally Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act) has been shaped by the dynamic of public control, which has been, in turn, shaped by Chapter 1. If school environments have as much to do with the organizational attributes of effectiveness as the comparative analysis of public and private schools indicates, and as the Chapter 1/Title I experience suggests, vigorous school organizations may be difficult to cultivate within the current system of public education. In order to be effective, public schools may have to adapt the organizational structure of private schools. Fundamental reform may be the only hope for school improvement, and hence for greater educational gains for the poor. A list of references is included. (BJV)

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EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR

Children who are raised in poverty currently run grave risks of educational failure--of falling far short of even moderate levels of cognitive development, of leaving high school without a diploma and ultimately of ending up in poverty for life (most recently see Kennedy, Jung, & Orland, 1986). It is not exactly clear why . It may be the hopelessness of their environments, the disinterest of their parents, or the inferiority of their schools. It may be all of these, and it is probably more. It is clear that the risk of educational failure is tragically large, and that fact has motivated government to try to reduce, if not minimize, that risk.

Not knowing precisely how to break the bond between economic and educational struggle, policymakers have tried many things. They have offered preparatory experiences for pre-schoolers, intensive instruction in the basics for slow learners, and occupational opportunities to potential dropouts. They have spent billions of dollars on educating the economically disadvantaged that would not otherwise have been spent on them. And, to some degree they have succeeded. Modest but favorable claims can now be made, for example, about Head Start, and about the single largest program for the educationally at-risk, namely, Chapter 1 of the 1981 Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (originally, Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act; for an overview of Title I's improving performance see Kirst & Jung, 1980). Two decades of experimentation with a severe but perplexing problem have resulted in at least some programs that make an identifiable difference.

But this is not to say that the difference is large or even satisfactory. It is probably not as large as the decline in educational achievement that was registered by all students--but especially secondary students--over the first fifteen years of this period (trends in test scores are examined most thoroughly in Congressional Budget Office, 1986). It is not a difference that even half of the at-risk children have experienced.[1] It has not been enough to reduce appreciably the dropout rate among the poor (Hanushek, 1986). And, it has not changed the sad fact that children raised in poverty run a serious risk of educational failure, perhaps every bit as serious as that which confronted them before efforts to help them began in earnest. Notwithstanding the real progress that has been made, there is ample room for improvement.

There is also room for new ideas about how that improvement can be made. Partly, this is because the educational problems of the poor are not well understood. Like the problems of educational achievement generally, they are highly complex involving not only the school (which policymakers can affect) but the family, the economy, and the whole of society (which policymakers cannot affect very skillfully). Educational research, really still in its infancy as a branch of social science, has foreclosed on some ideas for educational improvement--for example, the simple infusion of additional funds--but not on many. And, it is fair to say that for all of the

experimentation that has occurred in the field of helping the disadvantaged to learn, there is much that has never been tried. In Chapter 1, for example, more effort has probably been devoted to ensuring that children at risk of educational failure actually receive "something extra" than to designing something that significantly reduces that risk. But the room for experimentation lies not only within the Chapter 1 program itself; it lies beyond that realm in alternative approaches altogether, in approaches that might not see the provision of specialized and/or supplementary instruction as the key to aiding the disadvantaged.

This paper will ultimately consider one such alternative, but first it is necessary to lay some groundwork. Most basically, a perspective on educational failure must be developed so that alternative approaches to reform can be evaluated. Somewhat unconventionally, the perspective that will be offered here is not derived from a focus on the problems of the educationally disadvantaged or on the special programs that have been created to solve those problems. Rather, it derives from a concentration on the educational problems of young people generally and on the roles that schools, not programs, play in alleviating or worsening them. This may turn out to be inappropriate given the potentially special nature of the poor's educational difficulties. However, research that treats student achievement, broadly conceived, as a product of school organization and operation has recently proven very promising, and its potential implications for the achievement problems of the poor certainly bear consideration.

After briefly reviewing that research, this paper will offer a perspective on school performance--and hence on educational failure--that builds not only on the promising results of others, but on the results of a new national survey of public and private high schools. That perspective will then be used to examine the issue of how best to help the disadvantaged, and to suggest that Chapter 1 may not be the most effective way. That line of argument will make clear why a distinctly different approach to the educational problems of the poor should at least be entertained, and will, finally, indicate what such a reform would look like.

The Promise and Problems of Research on School Performance

Two very different bodies of recent research on school performance offer perhaps the most promising insights now available into the problem of student achievement. One is concerned with school effectiveness: what are the characteristics of schools that succeed in promoting academic achievement and other educational goals, and how can we institute reforms that encourage existing schools to develop these characteristics? The other is interested in school sector: are private schools more effective than public schools at educating students?

Research on school effectiveness has contributed to our understanding of schools in two important respects. First, a large and growing literature is building a consensus on some of the basic characteristics that seem to promote school effectiveness (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Gersten, Carnine, & Green, 1982; Farrar, Neufeld, & Miles, 1983; Neufeld, Farrar, & Miles, 1983). Generally speaking, these include strong instructional leadership by the principal, clear school goals, rigorous academic requirements, an orderly environment, an integral role for teachers in school decision making, cooperative principal-teacher relations, high parental involvement and support, and high teacher and principal expectations about student performance. Perhaps more importantly, this literature is establishing the central significance of one major aspect of the educational enterprise, namely school organization. What goes on inside a school, something that school research traditionally ignored, appears to have an important role in explaining school outcomes (classic "input-output" studies, weak on organizations, include Coleman et al., 1966 and Jencks et al., 1972).

Unfortunately, "appear" is the watchword of effective schools research. Its conclusions, however reasonable and widely shared, can only be regarded as tentative. Partly, this is a problem of method. Most of the work is based on case studies or qualitative analyses of small numbers of schools that gauge school performance impressionistically, i.e., without measures of student achievement (Sizer, 1984; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). Not only does this provide a weak foundation for generalization, it also leaves major doubts about the effects of schools per se.[2]

The largest problem with this research, however, is not one of method. It is a problem of conceptualization. In seeking to identify the causes of school success, this research has accumulated a lengthy list of things closely associated with good performance, but not a single cogent explanation of where, why, and when those things are found. School performance is often conceived very narrowly, for example, as a product of how teachers teach or principals lead. Yet, these things and other proximate sources of student achievement, such as homework and discipline, are bound up with each other, and with qualities of the student body and political, administrative, and economic aspects of the school environment. It is possible, consequently, that many of the familiar "causes" of school effectiveness may be of only secondary importance, not to mention of limited value as levers of school reform. Unfortunately, there are practical obstacles to broadening the perspective: comprehensive and representative data on school organization and environment are rare, and data that combine these qualities with information on student achievement are virtually nonexistent.[3]

Comparative research on public and private school performance has made equally valuable--but problematic--contributions. The central conclusion of this work, especially the research of James Coleman and his associates, is that school effectiveness depends to some degree on sector; private schools are evidently more effective

than public schools at producing academic achievement gains among comparable students (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Hoffer, Greeley, & Coleman, 1985). Notwithstanding criticism of this conclusion from various methodological, theoretical (and ideological) angles, it has essentially survived (for critiques see Bryk, 1981; Guthrie & Zusman, 1981; Murnane, 1981; Goldberger & Cain, 1982; Heyns & Hilton, 1982). This is important. First, it provides, the most reliable evidence yet that schools affect student achievement, that schools really matter. The research by the Coleman team is based on the largest, most extensive, and most appropriate survey ever conducted for analyzing school performance: High School and Beyond (HSB). Second, it suggests that the school environment, in this case public or private, may be closely linked to school organization and, in turn, performance.

The suggestion has not, however, been well investigated. The Coleman group chooses to explain differences in public and private school performance in terms of variables that are logically close to student achievement, namely homework and discipline. But given all that is known about school performance, it is likely that homework and discipline are merely pieces in a large puzzle that only when properly assembled produces an effective school. If reform is to improve school performance, this point must be appreciated. Public schools cannot be made to perform like private schools by mandating that they increase homework and stiffen discipline.

Progress in school improvement demands progress in school theory, and that requires the explanation of private school superiority to be rounded out. The many and related organizational factors that affect student achievement need to be investigated simultaneously. Their arrangement into more and less effective forms of organization, both between and among public and private schools, needs to be assessed in a manner that recognizes their interdependence with each other and with the students and environments they serve. As things now stand we do not know what exactly constitutes an effective organization, or when such an organization is likely to be found. As a result, we do not adequately understand why one school, private or public, outperforms another--and we are ill equipped to do anything about it.

A New Approach to School Performance

In the research I am conducting with Terry M. Moe of Stanford University, we are trying to develop a more comprehensive view of school organization and performance (Chubb & Moe, 1986a). We begin that effort by recognizing that a school, like any organization, survives, grows, and adapts through constant exchange with an environment--comprised, in this case, of parents, administrators, politicians, demographic changes, socioeconomic conditions, and a range of other forces that variously generate support, opposition, stress, opportunities for choice, and demands for change. Internally, it has its own distinctive structures and processes, its own

culture of norms, beliefs, and values, and its own technology for transforming inputs into outputs. The organization and its environment together constitute an overarching system of behavior in which, as the saying goes, everything is related to everything else: the environment shapes the internal organization, the organization generates outputs and they in turn have a variety of reciprocal effects on both the organization and its environment. The result over time is an iterative process of impact and adaptation.

It is impossible to capture all this richness in theory and research. It is undesirable as well. The key is to put this sort of organizational framework to use in simplified form, retaining only those elements most salient to the explanation. Our focus is on the construction of two interrelated models. The first attempts to explain organizational characteristics, the second attempts to explain outputs. The organizational model allows for the impacts of environment and outputs on school organization, as well as for reciprocal relationships among the organizational elements themselves. The output model understands important school products in terms of environmental and organizational influences.

To estimate these models, and more generally to put our organizational approach to an empirical test, it was necessary to have an unusually comprehensive data set. It had to include reliable quantitative indicators of student achievement and background, school structure, organization, and operation, and school environment, including the influences of parents, administrators, and politicians. No such data set existed when this project was conceived in 1982, but one came close. The High School and Beyond survey, first administered in 1980 and later supplemented by biennial follow-up surveys, provided an excellent data base for analyzing student achievement and measuring school performance in the public and private sectors alike. A data set comprised of the 1980 and 1982 waves could provide measures of actual student achievement for more than 25,000 students in roughly 1,000 schools nationwide, and enough information about the "causes" of that achievement outside of school--e.g., parental and peer influence--to gauge reliably the effectiveness of schools. The main problem with any data set derived from the HSB surveys is that it cannot provide adequate information about school organization and environment. Principals in the HSB study were surveyed for data available for the most part in school records--e.g., class sizes, course offerings--and teachers were queried only superficially.

The student data in the HSB survey are nonetheless among the best ever collected, so we decided to pursue our organizational approach by supplementing the HSB surveys with a new one aimed at organizational and environmental factors. The result is the "Administrator and Teacher Survey" (ATS), designed and directed by us and several colleagues. In 1984 it was used to obtain information from nearly 500 of the HSB schools, including most of the more than 100 private schools. Questionnaires were administered in each school to the principal and thirty teachers, among others. The survey permits detailed descriptions of schools--their relationships with parents and outside authorities, their interpersonal relationships,

and their educational atmospheres and practices. In other words, the survey provides reliable measures of the gamut of factors identified in qualitative research on school effectiveness, as well as measures of factors that might explain why the qualities of effectiveness arise. When merged, the HSB and ATS surveys provide a promising data base for explaining not only differences in school performance between the public and private sectors, but school performance generally.

Some Suggestive Findings

Evaluating this perspective on school performance is a complicated process, and the work, while well along, is not yet complete. The results we have obtained so far are very encouraging for they suggest that school organization, environment, and performance are bound together in predictable ways. This is well illustrated by a portion of the research that is complete: a comparison of public and private schools (Chubb & Moe, 1986b). The comparison is instructive because public and private schools obviously have very different environments, the former being characterized by political and authoritative control and the latter by market and competitive control. In addition, they seem to have different levels of effectiveness: current evidence suggests that private schools are in fact more effective than public schools at educating comparable students. It is reasonable to expect that private schools already tend to be characterized by precisely those organizational features that reformers have been urging on the public schools--and that it is the environmental differences between the two sectors that largely account for the organizational and performance differences.

For purposes of comparison, we broke down the private sector schools into three types: Catholic, Elite (high performance, college prep), and Other Private (a catch-all category). The results indicate that key aspects of the organizations and environments of public and private schools indeed differ systematically.

External Authorities

If the operation of politics and markets suggests anything, it is that public schools should find themselves operating in larger, more complex governing systems and that these governing systems should tend to leave them with less autonomy and control over their own policies, structure, goals, and operation. Public schools simply do not have available to them the same tools as private schools, namely the forces of the marketplace and the threat of going out of business, to ensure that schools do what clients (and especially voters) want them to do. They must rely on some hierarchical authority structure to set goals and ensure compliance. Of course, it is a foregone conclusion that the public governing system will be more complex when it comes to higher levels of political and administrative authority: public schools are part of state and Federal govern-

mental systems, and private schools generally are not. But what about immediate outside authorities, those best situated to oversee and constrain the school at the local level?

Not surprisingly, virtually all public schools are subordinate to school boards and to outside administrative superiors. Private schools are far more diverse, regardless of type. Most private schools have a school board of some sort, but many have no accompanying administrative apparatus. Such an apparatus is quite rare among the Elite schools and nearly half of the Other Private schools are similarly unencumbered. It is the Catholic schools that most resemble the public schools in this regard; some two-thirds of them have both school boards and administrative superiors.

Still, these patterns tell us only that private schools are subject to fewer outside authorities; they do not tell us whether the authorities that private schools actually do face are any less demanding than those that public schools face. It turns out, however, that they are. On five basic policy dimensions--curriculum, instructional methods, discipline, hiring, and firing--school boards in the public sector appear to have more influence over school policy than they do in the private sector, regardless of the type of private school, and principals, relative to their school boards, have less. When it comes to the influence of administrative superiors, the famed Catholic hierarchy (the only private sector hierarchy worth talking about) plays, by public sector standards, very little role in setting school policy. On all five dimensions, the influence of administrative superiors is far less in Catholic than in public schools, and Catholic principals have more autonomy in setting school policy than public principals do.

These are, of course, only simple measures of influence. But the patterns they yield are quite uniform and entirely consistent with the expectation that public schools, by virtue of their reliance on political control, will be subject to greater control by external authorities. The authorities that are so ubiquitous in the democratic context of the public school are often simply absent from private school settings. Even when they are an acknowledged part of the governing apparatus, they are less influential in the actual determination of school policy. Private schools, it would appear, have more control over their own destinies.

Staffing the Organization

External authorities are by no means the only constraints that limit the ability of a school to structure and operate its organization as it sees fit. Two in particular--tenure and unions--restrict a school's freedom to exercise perhaps its most significant form of control: its ability to recruit the kinds of teachers it wants and to get rid of those who do not live up to its standards. Public schools are much more constrained in these regards.

The ATS survey shows that 88 percent of public schools offer tenure while only a minority of the private schools do. Among the schools that do offer tenure, moreover, the proportion of teachers who have actually been awarded it reflects the same asymmetry: 80 percent of the eligible teachers in public schools have tenure, while the figure is some 10 to 16 percent lower in the private sector. The differences in unionization are even more substantial. The vast majority of public schools are unionized--some 80 percent--while in the private sector, teachers are rarely so organized. Only about 10 percent of the Catholic schools are unionized; virtually none of the Elites and Other Privates are.

Inherent differences between politics and markets help account for these disparate levels of constraint. Tenure systems in public schools are simply special cases of the civil service systems that exist at all levels of government. Unions are a product, at least in part, of the need among politicians for organization, money, and manpower--real assets in state and local elections where voter turnout is typically low. There is nothing to prevent unions from gaining a foothold in private schools nor to keep private schools from adopting tenure and other civil service-like protections; however, there is nothing comparable to government that drives them in that direction. Whether unions and tenure systems take hold in the private sector is determined to a far greater extent by the market.

But do these constraints perceptibly influence school control over important personnel issues? According to the principals in the ATS survey, they certainty do. Public principals claim to face substantially greater obstacles in dismissing a teacher for poor performance than private school principals indicate. The procedures are far more complex, the tenure rules more restrictive, and the preparation and documentation process roughly three times as long. Their complexity and formality make dismissal procedures the highest barrier to firing cited by public school principals. For private school principals the highest barrier is a personal reluctance to fire.

Even if superintendents and central offices wanted to reduce these obstacles—to delegate greater control over teachers to public school principals--many of these personnel decisions cannot in practice be delegated. In the public sector, tenure protections are usually guaranteed through laws that are written by school boards or state legislatures, and union contracts are typically bargained at the district level. Tenure and unionization tend to settle the question of when and how the basic personnel decisions will be made in the public sector.

Principals

According to much of the new literature on school effectiveness, the principal holds a key to school success. Excellence in education appears to be promoted by a principal who articulates clear goals, holds high expectations of students and teachers, exercises strong

instructional leadership, steers clear of administrative burdens, and effectively extracts resources from the environment. According to our perspective, the principal is also critical: he is responsible for negotiating successfully with the environment--for dealing somehow with demands and pressures from parents, unions, administrators, and school boards.

But this does not mean that schools necessarily will benefit from being headed by an adroit principal. The school environment can have a lot to say about whether the principal is able to practice the precepts of effective leadership. Effective leadership does not simply inhere in the individual filling the role; it is unavoidably contingent upon the demands, constraints, and resources that the principal must deal with. Depending on the nature and strength of these forces, even the "best" principal may have only a marginal effect on school performance.

The ATS survey disclosed substantial differences between public and private school principals. To begin with, private school principals have considerably more teaching experience--almost four years more for principals in Catholic schools, and over five years more for those in the Elites and Other Privates. Private school principals also come to their jobs with different motivations than their public counterparts. They are more likely to stress control over school policies, while public school principals place greater emphasis on a preference for administrative responsibilities, a desire to further their careers, and an interest in advancing to higher administrative posts.

These differences in experience and motivation appear to shape the principal's performance as a leader. As judged by their own teachers, private school principals are more effective instructional leaders and are more likely to exhibit other basic qualities of leadership--knowledge of school problems, openness with the staff, clarity and strength of purpose, and a willingness to innovate.

From the standpoint of politics and markets, these findings make sense. In the public sector, the administrative hierarchy offers an attractive avenue for career advancement. In the private sector, the governing structure offers fewer opportunities. Private school principals consequently stay in teaching longer, and their view of the principalship focuses more on its relation to the school than on its relation to their movement up an educational hierarchy. Of course, these are not the only determinants of leadership. Public school principals are forced to operate in much more complex, discordant circumstances in which educational success is more difficult to achieve regardless of the principal's (perhaps considerable) abilities. If anything, the public school principal's lack of teaching expertise and his hierarchic career orientation probably contribute to these leadership problems.

Goals and Policies

Given what we know of their environments, there is every reason to expect that public and private schools should adopt very different orientations toward the education of their students. Because public schools must take whoever walks in the door, they do not have the luxury of being able to select the kind of students best suited to organizational goals and structure. In practice this means that the pursuit of educational excellence must compete with much more basic needs--for literacy, for remedial training, for more slowly paced instruction. In addition, the hierarchical structure of democratic control ensures that a range of actors with diverse, often conflicting interests will participate in deciding what the public school ought to pursue and how. Private schools, largely unconstrained by comparison, should find it easier (if they want to do so) to place a high priority on excellence and, whatever their goals, to choose a set that is clear and consistent.

The results of the ATS survey confirmed these expectations. In terms of general goals, public schools place significantly greater emphasis on basic literacy, citizenship, good work habits, and specific occupational skills, while private schools--regardless of type--are more oriented toward academic excellence, personal growth and fulfillment, and human relations skills. These goals are also upheld by specific policies and are clearly discerned by the staff. Private schools have more stringent minimum graduation requirements; their students, regardless of track, must take significantly more English, history, science, math, and foreign language than public school students in order to graduate. Private schools also have more stringent homework policies. Finally, private teachers uniformly say that school goals are clearer and more clearly communicated by the principal than public teachers report; and they are more in agreement among themselves on school priorities.

All of these characteristics that private schools possess in greater abundance are stereotypical of effective schools. They are also characteristics that, due to the differential operation of politics and markets, would seem extremely difficult for public schools to develop in the same degree.

Teachers and Teaching

Politics and markets cannot hope to tell us everything we might want to know about organizational structure and process, but they point us in a clear direction. The critical fact about the public school environment is not just that it is complex, but that it imposes decisions about policy, structure, personnel, and procedure on the school. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the control over the most crucial agent of organizational performance: the teacher.

As we have seen, the public school principal is far less able than his private counterpart to staff his organization according to

his best judgment. This, in turn, should promote differences in staff heterogeneity and conflict. Public school teachers may reject the principal's leadership, dissent from school goals and policies, get along poorly with their colleagues, or fail to perform acceptably in the classroom--but the principal must somehow learn to live with them. When these teachers are represented by unions, as they normally are, leadership difficulties are magnified. Professionalism takes on new meaning: as a demand that decision-making power be transferred from the principal to the teachers. Private schools are not immune from personnel problems and struggles for power. But the fact that the principal has much greater control over hiring and firing means that he can take steps to recruit the kinds of teachers he wants and weed out those he does not. It also means that teachers have a strong inducement to perform.

By comparison to his public school counterpart, the private school principal is better able to create a team of teachers whose values, skills, and willingness to work together tend to mirror those qualifications he deems conducive to the pursuit of organizational goals. At the same time, he is in a position to make teacher professionalism work for rather than against him. Without real threat to his own authority or control, he can encourage teachers to participate in decision-making, extend them substantial autonomy within their own spheres of expertise, and promote a context of interaction, exchange of ideas, and mutual respect.

The data from the ATS survey support this general line of reasoning. Private school principals consistently claim that a larger percentage of their schools' teachers are "excellent," suggesting that these principals are more confident in the abilities of their own staff members than public school principals are in theirs. Private sector teachers, in turn, have better relationships with their principals. They are consistently more likely to regard the latter as encouraging, supportive, and reinforcing. Private school teachers also feel more involved and efficacious in important areas of school decision making that bear on their teaching. They feel more influential over schoolwide policies, and in their classrooms, they believe they have more control over most matters that govern their effectiveness.

Relative harmony between private school principals and teachers is matched by relative harmony among the private teachers themselves. On a personal level, relationships are more collegial in the private sector. On a professional level, private school teachers give greater evidence of mutual involvement and support. It should come as no surprise that private school teachers, are much more satisfied with their jobs, have better attendance records, and tend to work for less money. Private schools do look more like teams.

School Control and School Organization

Why private schools tend to develop team-like organizations is a question of potentially great import for school improvement: Private schools appear to be more effective than public schools, and the team qualities that distinguish private schools--strong leadership, shared goals, cooperative decision making, collegial relationships, mutual trust, widespread efficacy--are the very qualities that research on school improvement has identified as keys to student achievement. To be sure, private schools may owe some of this organizational esprit de corps to the better students and more supportive parents that, on average, they work with. But not all of it. In analyses that we are currently completing on the merged HSB-ATS data set we have tentatively found that the school environment is at least as important as the school clientele in determining the organizational climate of the school. Significantly, this appears to be every bit as true of the shaping of school organizations within the public sector as it is between the public and the private sectors: more complex and constraining environments are associated with more troubled school organizations regardless of sector. Still, the differences between the organizations and environments of public and private schools are so striking that they must be understood--not only for what they may say about the influence of school control but, as we shall see, for what they may disclose about the prospects for school improvement both within and outside of public education systems.

It is important to recognize that public schools are captives of democratic politics. They are subordinates in a hierarchical system of control in which myriad interests and actors use the rules, structures, and processes of democracy to impose their preferences on the local school. It is no accident that public schools are lacking in autonomy, that principals have difficulty leading, and that school goals are heterogeneous, unclear, and undemanding. Nor is it an accident that weak principals and tenured, unionized teachers struggle for power and hold one another in relatively low esteem. These sorts of characteristics constitute an organizational syndrome whose roots are deeply anchored in democratic control as we have come to know it.

Private schools are controlled by society too, but there are few, if any, political or administrative mechanisms to ensure that they respond as they "should." They make their own decisions about policy, organization, and personnel subject to market forces that signal how they can best pursue their own goals and prosperity. Given their substantial autonomy, it is not surprising to find that principals are stronger leaders, that they have greater control over hiring and firing, that they and the teachers they choose have greater respect for and interaction with one another, and that teachers--without conflict or formal demands--are more integrally involved in school decision making. As in the public sector, these sorts of organizational characteristics are bound up with one another, and they jointly arise from the surrounding environment. Different environments promote different organizational syndromes.

Politics, Bureaucracy, and Chapter 1

In thinking about how best to help disadvantaged children it may well be instructive to appreciate how much the experience of Chapter 1 (and Title I) has been shaped by the dynamic of public control—and how much that dynamic has itself been shaped by Chapter 1. When Title I was legislated in 1965, it was conceived as a way for the Federal government to provide compensatory educational services to disadvantaged children without becoming involved itself in the delivery of education. As it had in so many other categorical grants-in- aid, the government in Washington would send funds to qualifying lower governments (in this instance, ones with certain concentrations of poor people) on the condition that the funds would be spent for some federally designated purpose. This enabled the Federal government to do what it arguably could do best—raise and redistribute revenue—and left the lower governments to exploit their comparative advantage in supplying services to suit local demands. Cumbersome and costly administrative arrangements would be minimized and efficiency would be maximized.

Unfortunately, things did not quite work out that way. Federal policymakers had underestimated the difficulty of accomplishing national goals through subnational governments and agencies. There was often a conflict of interest between the national and the lower governments and a severe asymmetry of information about what interests were being satisfied. Lower governments did not always agree that Federal funds should be spent directly on serving the educationally disadvantaged; spending on teacher salaries, physical facilities, general school improvements, or even future tax savings were sometimes regarded as more desirable. In addition, since only local governments knew for sure how additional funds (in large fungible budgets) were really being spent, they enjoyed an advantage over Federal authorities who were trying to ensure that their goals were being realized. The problem that Federal authorities faced was a classic one of organizational design, a "principal-agent" problem.[4] If the "principals" in Washington did not take measures to overcome the conflicts of interest and informational asymmetries between them and their state and local "agents," they were going to find their agents "shirking" their mandated responsibilities. Because Title I initially included no such measures, shirking indeed occurred.

In theory, this is easy to overcome. "Principals" can monitor their "agents" directly to see that appropriate effort is being made to satisfy the "principals'" goals. Or they can offer their "agents" incentives for satisfying goals, without prompting a costly amount of monitoring. In the private sector combinations of monitoring and incentives are frequently used. But in the public sector, they usually are not. Incentives tend to be precluded by the difficulty of measuring productivity in the absence of markets for public goods. The public sector therefore relies mostly on monitoring—on rules, regulation, and reporting, i.e., on bureaucracy.

Federal policymakers, alerted by beneficiary groups that Title I funds were not always reaching the disadvantaged, began monitoring state and local educational agencies more carefully in the late 1960s (on the early implementation experience see Murphy, 1971 and McLaughlin, 1975). Their intention was not to tell the agencies precisely how to spend their money, but rather, in the spirit of the policy's initial conception, to ensure that the money was spent on the statute's goal, namely improving the educational experiences of the disadvantaged. In time, monitoring proved an awkward and inadequate tool for accomplishing this deceptively simple goal. The Federal government could not afford to supervise directly the behavior of all the state and local agencies participating in the program (though it did increase its auditing sharply in the early 1970s); hence, it opted for specifying in ever greater detail the standards that agencies would have to meet to pass occasional Federal inspections (See Chubb, 1985b). Even these very extensive and explicit regulations--for example, "supplement, not supplant," "excess costs," and "comparability"--did not expressly violate the Federal government's objective of staying out of local educational processes. But in effect they did.

To make these regulations work with a minimum of direct Federal supervision, the Federal government had to find some way to get "agents" at the state and local level to work with them rather than against them. State and local educational authorities, not to mention general governmental authorities, resisted an alliance because their interest was fundamentally in autonomy. So, lacking any ready converts to Federal objectives, the national government began paying for the employment of state and local "agents" it could call its own. Title I allocations included funds to establish and maintain state and local offices of compensatory education or any other administrative arrangement that would ensure the financial and educational integrity of the program. Once in place, compensatory education agencies had powerful incentives to see to it that Title I funds were properly allocated and appropriately spent, and that eligible beneficiaries were actually served: Their very existence depended on the maintenance of the program, which ultimately depended on its satisfactory implementation. These agencies were also in excellent positions to carry out their mission: They suffered no informational disadvantages and, in time, they developed the political influence--via beneficiary support and their own organizations--to encourage state and local officials to stay in line (See Chubb, 1985c).

The Federal government cultivated these new allies with more than financial support. They interacted with them regularly, encouraged their participation in intergovernmental associations, and ultimately engendered a sense of professional commitment that united administrators from Washington to the lowest level (See Hill, 1979). In the process, the Federal government overcame its "principal-agent" problem. By 1980 conflict and suspicion had given way to cooperation and trust--or at least healthy measures of these things--and the spiral of regulation and monitoring could be permitted to stop (Kirst & Jung, 1980; Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, in press). An intergovernmen-

tal bureaucracy, committed to Federal purposes, had been integrated into state and local educational bureaucracies and was operating relatively smoothly. Federal monies were finally supplementing in significant amounts the educations that were being received by the economically and educationally disadvantaged (on the fiscal effectiveness of Title I see Chubb, 1985c).

The process did not, however, leave subnational educational practices essentially intact nor preserve state and local autonomy. To begin with, it contributed to the centralization of school control. While local education agencies--that is, school districts--were designated as the legally responsible officials at the service delivery level, state education agencies were given responsibility for allocating Federal funds and for holding local officials accountable. One effect was to draw local districts increasingly under the influence of state authority. But a more important consequence may have been the shift of authority from the individual school to the district. School districts were given the chore of allocating funds among schools and seeing that these funds, in turn, reached eligible students. In practice this came to mean that schools were less free to choose how best to serve their disadvantaged students, and instead districts were in charge. It also meant that districts had to establish monitoring and reporting procedures and to create jobs and, in large districts, entire offices for performing these routines--not only for compensatory education, but for a host of other categorical programs with similar political and administrative problems.

How much this process of centralization contributed to the general one that was diminishing school autonomy during that time is difficult to say. It is true that Federal assistance facilitated the overall growth of state and local bureaucracy; however, the connection between Federal grants-in-aid and educational centralization has not been well investigated.[5] Still, there is no gainsaying the price in autonomy that has been paid by schools on issues and concerns touched by Federal programs. A good case in point is the uniformity of services now provided by schools to students eligible for compensatory education. From state to state, district to district, and school to school educators have converged on a relatively small number of approaches to serving the poor. Among the most common is the concentration of services on the lowest grades of school and the provision of supplementary instruction in reading to children removed from their regular classes for just that purpose (Kennedy, Jung, & Orland, 1986; Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, in press). While so-called "pullout" programs may be on the wane with increasing doubts about their effectiveness, uniformity continues to be the rule. It is important to understand why. It is not because educator after educator has concluded that one approach represents the best way to serve eligible students. It is rather because special programs such as "pullouts" provide the strongest evidence that local authorities can offer to outside authorities that appropriate students are receiving supplementary services.

Significantly, there has been little change in this system over recent years--even though Chapter 1 frees lower governments of many

of the regulations established under Title I. The administrative apparatus for carrying out Federal purposes is either so well entrenched that forces for change are being successfully resisted, or the fear of re-regulation is so great that past routines are being continued out of sheer prudence. Whatever the reason, there is little evidence that increases in administrative flexibility have produced innovations in the services that the disadvantaged are receiving. The program and its central objectives are well institutionalized.

Rethinking Reform

The implementation experience of Title I and Chapter 1 illustrates perfectly the potential consequences—often adverse—of trying to improve education through the public system as it is currently constituted. Through an escalating exchange of regulation and resistance between the top of the system and the bottom, a program intended to give resources and discretion to schools with needy children turned into a program delivering highly uniform supplementary services to some of the children in need but offering precious little to the schools themselves. This outcome, it is important to understand, was not the result of considered decisions by educational professionals about how best to educate the poor, nor was it the result of judgments by politicians about the most effective course of action to take. It was not, however, inadvertent. Federal politicians, under pressure from constituency groups to see that eligible children received compensatory education, reacted in the only way they had at their disposal: by demanding that Federal bureaucrats placate those groups. In turn, Federal bureaucrats and their subnational allies used the only tools at their disposal—regulation and auditing—to force local education agencies to help the children of the groups that were complaining. Finally, those agencies responded by providing compensatory education in ways that most readily demonstrated their compliance.

Over time these intergovernmental conflicts have given way to more cooperative implementation routines. But has this adaptive process produced a successful compensatory education policy? Obviously, that is an important question in thinking about improvement. However, it is not the only question—nor perhaps even the most important one. We must also ask whether the process that produced the current policy can be relied upon to generate improvements.

The question of Chapter 1's success has been addressed many times, and answered in many ways. In recent years, the answers have tended to be positive. It is almost certain that Federal spending has increased the resources devoted to educating the poor. Federal aid for poor students is not only proving to be genuinely supplementary; it also seems to be stimulating state and local spending for the same purposes.[6] In addition, there are favorable signs that students receiving compensatory education are achieving more than

they would without it (favorable evaluations are reviewed in Kirst & Jung, 1980 and Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, in press).

Still, there is room to question Chapter 1's success and its ultimate desirability. To begin with, many children who are economically and educationally disadvantaged—probably half of the total—do not receive Chapter 1 services, either because they attend schools that have not been designated by their districts to receive compensatory services, or if they attend designated schools, are enrolled in grades that are not receiving services. Second, the schools that Chapter 1 children attend are not demonstrably better off by virtue of offering compensatory services. The children may be, but the schools are not. This has repercussions not only for students who are not receiving compensatory services, but for ones who are. If children are benefiting from supplementary services but otherwise suffering from the poor educational environments of their schools, their educations remain problematic. To be sure, students are better off receiving services than not receiving them. But this is not to say they are being well served.

For one thing, if the centralization process to which compensatory education contributed is in some measure responsible for the deterioration that public education experienced during the time Title I was being implemented, the compensatory services that some disadvantaged students are receiving may simply be making up for ground that the program itself helped to lose. Be that as it may, there is also a firm basis for questioning the very approach to compensatory education that Chapter 1 has come to embody. Both the literature on effective schools and our own research on public and private schools indicate that school performance has more to do with a complex of factors that characterize schools as total organizations than with any particular programs that schools may provide. Successful schools are distinguished by interdependent qualities—strong leadership, a sense of mission, shared decision making, relative teacher autonomy— that bind schools together and foster teamwork. This appears to be as true of schools that teach the rich as it is of schools that teach the poor. Compensatory education as it is currently conceived and implemented does nothing to nurture these qualities. To the contrary, by increasing the control of the school from the outside, it may discourage their development. The implication for reform, then, is quite plain: If research on school organization and performance is on target, compensatory education might be more successful if it were aimed at improving the schools that the disadvantaged attend rather than at increasing the services that some of these students receive.

The remaining question, of course, is how this can be done. How can schools that educate the disadvantaged be encouraged to develop the organizational attributes of effectiveness? If school environments have as much to do with the development of these attributes as the comparative analysis of public and private schools indicates, and as the Title I/Chapter 1 experience suggests, vigorous school organizations may be difficult to cultivate within the current system of public education.

For example, consider the expressed desire of the current school reform movement to create such organizations. The rhetoric of reformers is replete with support for greater school autonomy, stronger leadership from principals, and more respect for the professional judgment of teachers. But what reformers fail to appreciate is that these improvements cannot simply be imposed on schools in the public sector. As the compensatory education experience so well illustrates, politicians and administrators have little incentive to support fundamental reform; their careers are tied to their own control over the schools, and they are unavoidably responsive to interest groups with stakes in the centralized arrangements of the status quo. Reforms that manage to get adopted--for example, tougher graduation requirements and student competency tests--leave the basic structure of the system intact, and, more than that, encourage the further regulation and standardization of educational practices within the school.

In time, it is also likely that whatever reforms are adopted will tend to be neutralized and assimilated. Increases in school autonomy are likely to be restricted once school principals take steps that create political difficulties for superintendents or school boards. Reductions in the number of strings attached to compensatory aid are likely to be turned around once interest groups resume complaining that they cannot identify the additional services that schools are providing. Public schools did not lose autonomy nor suffer the organizational consequences of that loss by accident or misunderstanding. And, the new-found wisdom that we may be paying a price for a superfluity of accountability is not likely to change things. The various components of the current system are so closely interconnected and so driven toward control from the top that attempts to improve part of the system in isolation from all of the rest--for example, by restructuring Chapter 1--are likely to set off a series of compensating changes that minimize the impact of the reform.

Where does this leave the prospects for improvement? In rather sad shape--if improvements must be pursued within the existing system. Real improvements may require a different system. It may be necessary to organize the provision of education in some way other than through direct democratic control, as we have come to know it, if the apparent educational problems of centralization, standardization, and routinization are to be avoided. At the very least, the possibility must be entertained.

If schools are to develop the organizational qualities that research now indicates are essential for real educational gains, it may even be necessary to emulate the system of control that governs private schools, where teaching and professional autonomy flourish. Government would still set minimum standards. It would also provide funding, probably in the form of vouchers allocated directly to parents. Students who are difficult to educate, especially the economically disadvantaged, would receive larger vouchers to induce schools to provide for them. But the government, besides providing graduated funding and setting basic standards, would do little else.

Virtually all of the important decisions about policy, organization, and personnel would be taken out of the hands of politicians and administrators and given over to schools and their clients: the students and their parents.

In a system requiring competition for students and resources, schools would have incentives to move toward more efficient and effective forms of organization. Schools that clung to costly bureaucratic methods, that did not attract and utilize talented people, that failed to encourage collegial and productive relationships among their members, or that lacked strong leadership toward clearly defined educational goals would tend to go out of business. Effective schools would tend to prosper.

The added virtue of this system for the disadvantaged is that it would provide a way to overcome the considerable professional ignorance about how best to serve those struggling students. Experimentation would be encouraged. Schools and programs that failed to serve the disadvantaged effectively would be weeded out while those that succeeded would grow. The process would almost certainly move schools away from their current reliance on special classes for the disadvantaged and toward a greater variety of services. But even if it did not, there would at least be reason to believe that the programs in place were justified by their educational merits. Today's programs are justified largely by their political and administrative merits. Some will say that parents, especially of the poor, are not wise enough to make the process of natural selection work. But parental wisdom is not a prerequisite for the process to move forward. Even if many parents continued to send their children to the school closest to their home, the neighborhood school would be a better one: The school would have the novel concern that some day parents might find an alternative school more attractive and leave.

Obviously, any change as fundamental as this runs the risk of political infeasibility. Unless the quality or equity of public education declines further, it will be difficult to overcome the opposition of organized groups whose interests are threatened by fundamental reform. Still, there is increasing sympathy among establishment groups--for example, the National Governors Association--for the idea of providing schools with greater autonomy in exchange for schools taking greater responsibility for performance. And, there is even a proposal now before Congress to convert Chapter 1 funds to compensatory vouchers. These are significant developments. To be sure, they do not promise enormous improvements. Even the fairly radical idea of providing Chapter 1 vouchers does little more than increase parental choice by a modicum; it does nothing to increase school autonomy. The significance of the ideas is what they signal: serious interest in basic school reform. If schools are indeed products of their environments, and if the way they are organized really shapes their performance, fundamental reform may be the only type of reform that offers genuine hope for school improvement, and through it, greater educational gains for the poor.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Estimates of the number of eligible children served by Chapter 1 vary, but as Kennedy, Jung, and Orland (1986) indicate, 50 percent is roughly at the center of this range.

2. Even those few studies that analyze actual student achievement (e.g., Rutter et al., 1979; Brookover et al., 1979) rely on limited samples of schools.

3. The best survey on school organization, despite being based on an unrepresentative sample, is probably Goodlad (1984); however, it lacks data on student achievement. The best current survey of students and their abilities is probably High School and Beyond; however, it is weak on organizational measures.

4. This framework is used more formally to evaluate the implementation of Title I in Chubb (1985c).

5. The impact of Federal aid on state and local bureaucracy is discussed and estimated in Chubb (1985a).

6. The growing fiscal effectiveness of the program can be seen by comparing the estimates of Feldstein (1977) for 1970 and of Chubb (1985c) for the period 1965-1979; the period effect is two-thirds higher.